



For the Achievement of Valued Places for People through Design

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**For the achievement of
valued places
for people through design**

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May 2010



**Landscape Institute
Northern Ireland**

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NB: Italics represent author's emphasis throughout

For the achievement of valued places for people through design

This review aims to provide information to assist the management of valued *places through good design* through core strategies of local authorities in a reformed Northern Ireland planning system.

Abstract

Current CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) documentation, 'Planning for Places', advocates an approach to planning for the design of *places* which is parallel to the approach already embodied within the European Landscape Convention (which became legally binding in the UK in 2006). Nation states signing up to the European Landscape Convention are obliged to identify and 'characterise' all *landscapes* within their boundaries, evaluate and define objectives for them, and track and manage change within them. The authors maintain that the terms place and landscape are interchangeable; both result from the interaction between human communities in specific environments (see fig. 1). The European Landscape Convention enacts a process of *visioning* and management of *change*, and as such the authors advise its adoption as a *design* process in Northern Ireland for the achievement of valued places and landscapes. A brief review of steps taken throughout the UK and Ireland towards the implementation of the European Landscape Convention illustrates that despite the characterisation of all landscapes in Northern Ireland for the Department of the Environment (NI) in 2000, full implementation of the process embodied in the European Landscape Convention is *inadequate*.

The authors advocate that a body in Northern Ireland should be clearly responsible for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention in Northern Ireland, and task that body to work for the achievement of valued places and landscapes through its processes (as in the examples reviewed in UK and Ireland). The authors attest that a 'gap' analysis should be urgently undertaken to evaluate where the requirements of the European Landscape Convention are not being met in Northern Ireland. The authors reiterate statements by the Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment in Northern Ireland (MAG) and the Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch (LINI) that, in order to achieve valued places and landscapes, it is essential to retain *design expertise within the planning process*. The authors perceive the current *planning reform* in Northern Ireland to be an opportunity to address the obligations of the European Landscape Convention and to successfully work to the achievement of valued places and landscapes in Northern Ireland.

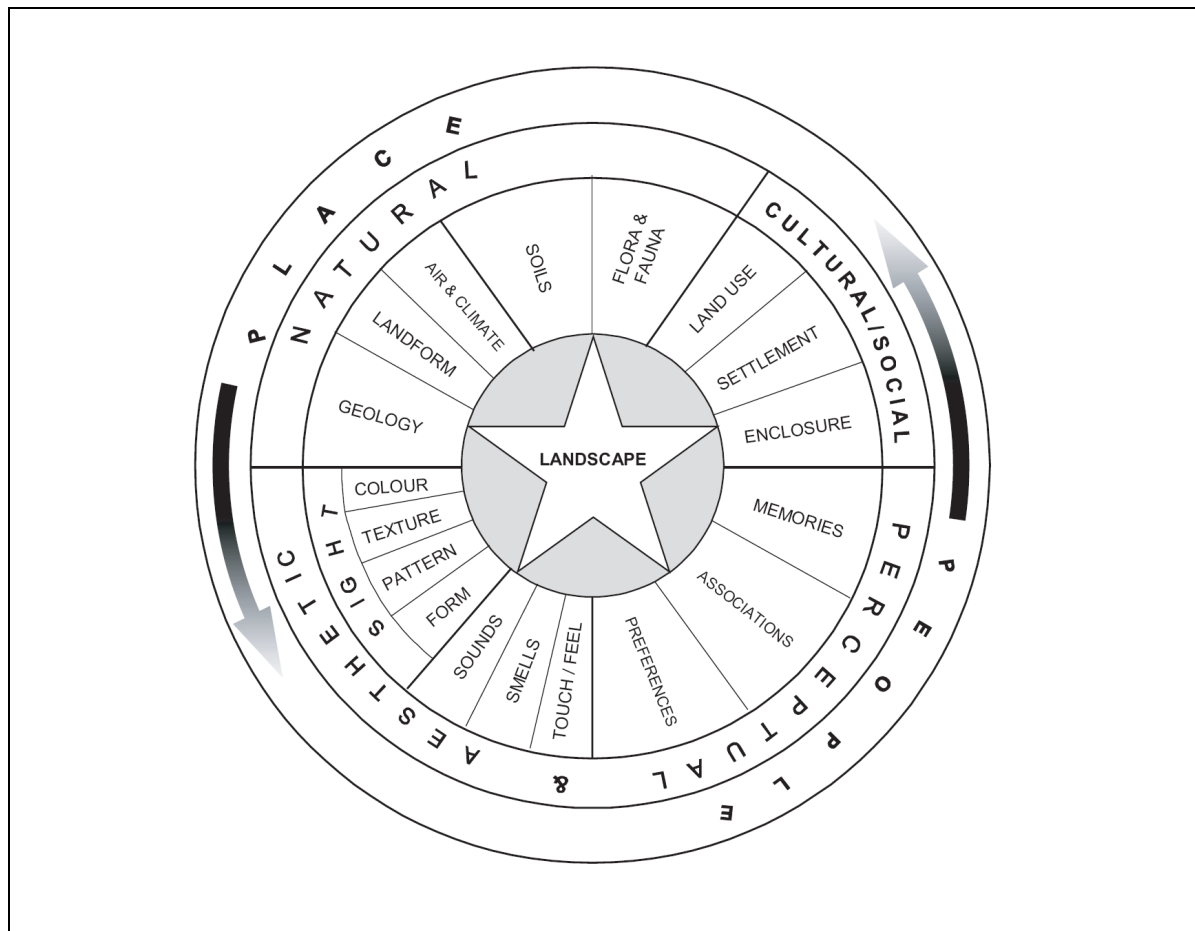


Fig 1. Landscape is the resultant of interaction between people and the environment (Swanwick 2002)

The European Landscape Convention

The **European Landscape Convention** (ELC) drawn up by the Council of Europe in 2000 establishes a method of landscape categorisation, evaluation and management guidelines for the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe with and by the planning system. The ELC recognises that the quality of landscape resource impacts considerably on economic, cultural, social ecological and environmental success, and therefore *all* landscapes matter. The purposes of the ELC apply to “the entire territory of the Signatory Parties and covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas. It includes land, inland water and marine areas. It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes.” (Council of Europe, 2000).

The ELC provides the following definition of landscape: “an area, as perceived by people, whose character *is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*” (Council of Europe, 2000). Landscape (or place) is broadly understood as the resultant

interaction between people and the natural environment the characteristics of which create a particular place, community lifestyle and identity (Swanwick and Land Use Consultants, 2002, and LINI 2009b, and others).

Adhering to this definition of landscape the ELC establishes the following principles: 'landscape policy' (the principles, strategies and guidelines that permit the taking of specific measures aimed at the protection, management and planning of landscapes); 'landscape quality objective' (the managed aspirations for a specific landscape). 'Landscape protection' (the actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape derived from its heritage value, natural configuration, and/or from human activity); 'landscape management' (the action, from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by a social, economic and environmental processes); and 'landscape planning' or landscape design (the strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes) are defined in the ELC as the mechanisms by which landscape quality objectives are achieved (i.e. the design of good quality place) (Council of Europe, 2000).

Articles 5 to 9 of the convention (summarised below) lay out the measures required by the ELC for which landscape policy and quality objectives might be undertaken in order to achieve protection, management and forward design of valued environments.

Article 5: states signing up to the convention will

- a. recognise landscapes in law
- b. establish and implement policies for the protection, management and planning of landscape;
- c. provide local councils with procedures to achieve the above
- d. and integrate landscape purposes into regional and town planning policies for cultural, environmental, agricultural, social and economic matters

Article 6: states signing up to the convention will

- A. increase awareness throughout society and public authorities of the value and role of landscapes.
- B. train specialists in landscape appraisal, policy, management, and planning/design, and promote university courses
- C. identify its landscapes, characterise them, take note of change, assess them,...
- D. ... define objectives for them
- E. ... and put these policies into effect

Article 9: states signing up to the convention will cooperate across local and regional administrative boundaries.

The ELC has been signed and ratified, and brought into force by 30 of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2010). RECEP-ENELC, an organisation

established to assist local authorities throughout Europe implement their obligations according to the ELC, articulates the ELC as “...an international legal framework for a political project aimed at sharing and consolidating a new approach to landscape issues continent-wide. It sets forth principles committing the Contracting States to adopt policies and measures aimed at enhancing the quality of landscapes throughout the national territory, as well as involving the people concerned in the relevant public decision-making processes. The ELC provisions relating to the division of public responsibilities make an explicit reference to the principle of subsidiary and local self-government. Accordingly, the ELC Contracting States undertake to involve local and regional authorities in the establishment and the implementation of landscape policies, landscape identification / assessment procedures, the definition of quality objectives and interventions in the areas concerned. At national level, the entry into force of these provisions has prompted a growing number of local and regional authorities to strengthen their institutional commitment with regard to landscape. In most cases, this process involved a gradual but substantial adaptation of their technical, administrative, legal and/or statutory framework.” (RECEP-ENELC, 2009a)

UK review of ELC implementation

In 2006, the UK government signed and ratified the European Landscape Convention (ELC), publicly stating that the UK is already compliant with its purposes (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2006). Prior to signing up to the ELC, the UK regions had already actioned, to various extents, landscape characterisation and evaluation and set forth management principles for these identified landscape units. The methods by which this is achieved vary between the regions. Since signing up to the ELC, DEFRA (UK government department responsible for policy and regulations on environment, food and rural affairs, with executive functions within England) is the responsible body for the implementation of the ELC in UK. DEFRA coordinates a UK ELC steering group which meets every 6 months. In each region ELC implementation is coordinated by a partnership of central government and Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB) (except in Northern Ireland where these agencies are within the government department). (see Fig. 2).

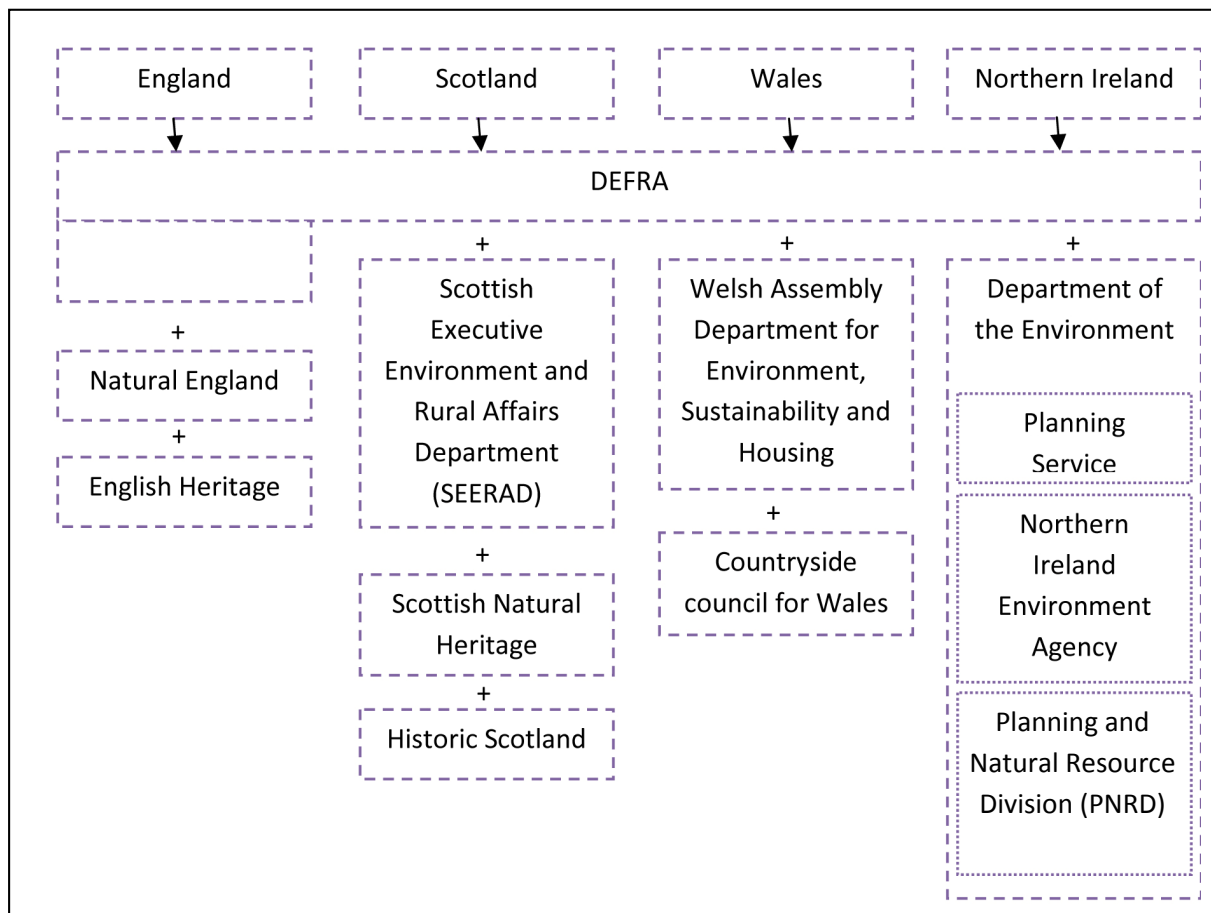


Fig 2. Government responsibility for implementation of the European Landscape Convention in UK

In 2009, DEFRA commissioned Newcastle University School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape to establish a baseline for of the European Landscape Convention in the UK and the monitoring of its impact (Newcastle University Landscape Research Group, 2009). Key findings were as follows.

- Section 2:
- b. ...the 'direction of travel' towards *improved consistency with ELC in UK policy* is generally positive.
 - c. There is potential to *make links to ELC more explicit within policy ...* to align the performance of all 4 devolved administrations
 - d. ...policy tends to emphasise *protection* and *management* of landscape and there is considerable scope to further develop potentials *for forward thinking and planning*.
 - e. *All the ELC articles need to be considered:* ...while some of the Articles are well reflected in UK policy, there are some areas that need some further attention e.g. clearer definition of and articulation of quality.
- Section 3:
- a. The development of ELC implementation techniques and monitoring is necessarily an ongoing process.

- b. Now that the baseline has been constructed the most important thing is to ensure that good *monitoring* occurs.

The UK-wide Landscape Institute, which has branches throughout the regions, seeks to be recognised as the UK's leading advocate for the ELC and the benefits of implementing it (LI 2007). The Landscape Institute (LI) is the chartered professional institute in the UK for landscape architects, incorporating designers, managers, and scientists concerned with conserving the environment. The LI promotes the highest standards in the practice of landscape planning, design, management and research, and is committed to the principles of sustainable development by improving the quality of design of, and the protection and enhancement of our natural and built environments. The LI is currently undertaking an evaluation of how its work currently conform to ELC requirements and is considering how the benefits of the treaty might be maximised through if operations (LI, 2010).

Regional Overview

England

The lead implementing body for the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in England is **Natural England**. The whole of England was categorised into 159 Landscape Character Areas in 2006 by the Countryside Agency (now Natural England). Following guidelines produced by the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, the assessments for each landscape character area were carried out by the relevant local planning authorities. The assessments detail *local landscape units* within each landscape character area, and quality objectives and management guidelines which are incorporated into planning process. The assessments are continuously updated by the local planning authorities.²

When the ELC came into force in the UK, a steering group between Natural England, English Heritage and DEFRA developed a framework for implementation which was published in 2007 (Natural England, 2007). A more recent framework was produced in 2009 (Natural England, 2009). Combined actions from both framework documents are summarised as follows:

- Review of *all Government policies for compliance with ELC purposes*; (who is responsible for improving these policies accordingly (at National, local and regional levels); if Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes can achieve the required improvements; whether existing instruments in local plans and special development area plans can be used to achieve the required improvements?)

² This is an online database, accessible at www.landscapecharacter.org.uk/db/index.html

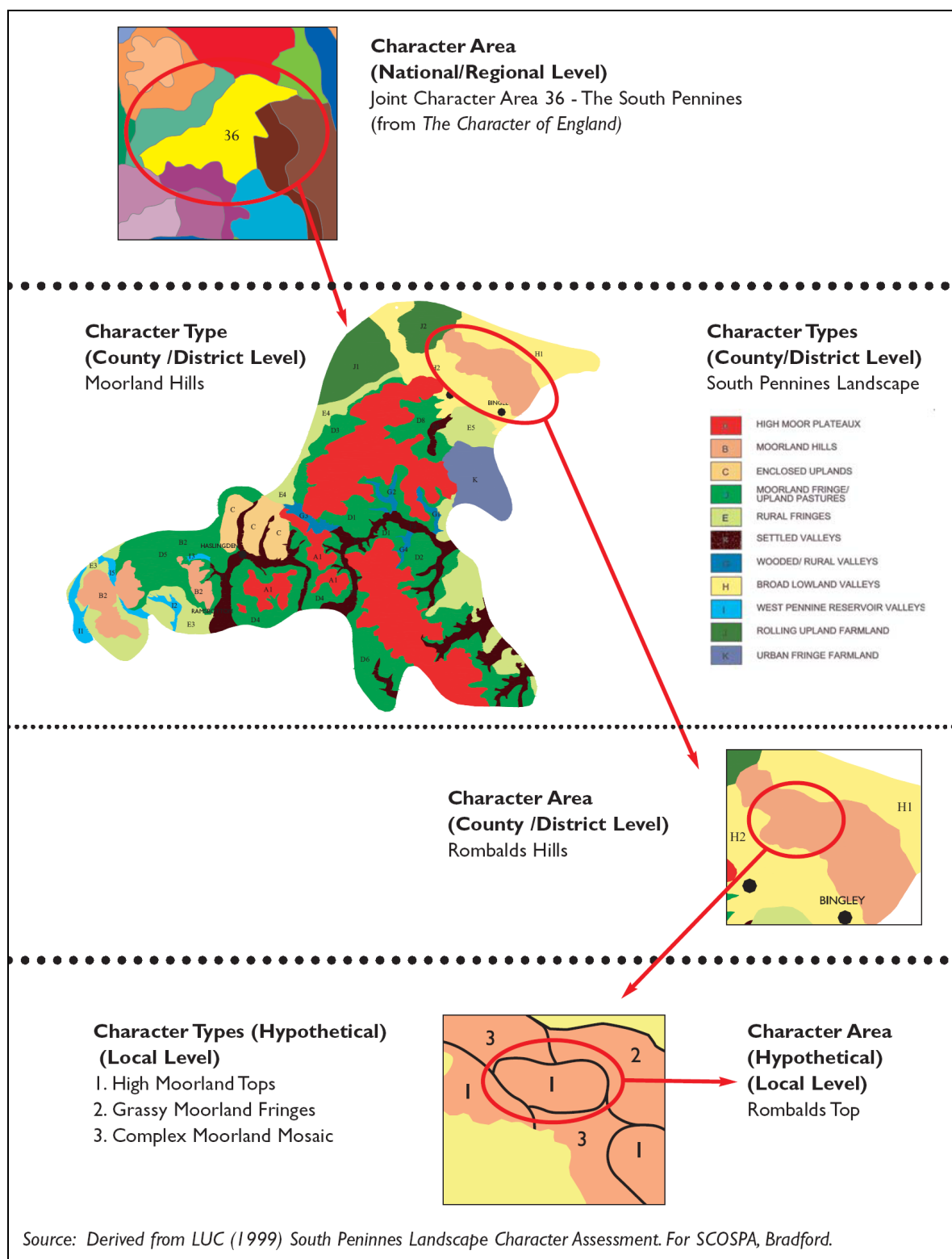


Fig 3. Landscape Character Assessment spatial hierarchy – example of the relationship between the levels from national to local. Local assessment of LCAs are carried out in England by local county authorities (Swanwick 2002)

- *ELC Action Plans to be drawn up by principal landowners* (eg. Forestry Commission); invite government departments and local authorities to write ELC Action Plans.
- Landscape Characterisation Assessments to be completed and standardised, and include another *community-driven local level of landscape character units*. (see Fig.3)
- Natural England to support research into encouraging and developing public commitment to *landscape value and design value*. (Investigate if current methods of landscape understanding should be improved research undertaken into people's perceptions of landscape, visioning process developed for Natural England work regarding the ELC, annual standing conference planned.)
- Natural England to investigate if current methods of landscape understanding should be improved
- Natural England to develop a *landscape vision* of England. (Natural England has developed a vision for the natural environment 2060.)
- Natural England to communicate ELC tools to all institutions / authorities/ public; *create a forum for sharing good practice* (Natural England has set up the Landscape Character Network through which they publicise all their research and public documents. It is an information sharing network dedicated to landscape, promoting Landscape Character Assessment and the ELC); host training in ELC implementation practices
- Natural England to investigate methods of *embedding landscape thinking* into local authorities practice

Scotland

Implementation of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in Scotland is overseen by a steering group made up the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department, **Scottish Natural Heritage** (SNH) and Historic Scotland. SNH considers that Scotland is already compliant with polices set forth by the ELC but employs its requirements as a framework for development and further effort.

SNH has categorised the whole of Scotland into 275 Landscape Character Types. These have been assessed in 30 landscape character assessments including evaluation, quality objectives and management guidelines which have been carried out by various consultants, and are variously incorporated into local planning processes.³

SNH established the *Scottish landscape forum* (now ceased), bringing together a range of public sector, commercial, and NGO stakeholders with a landscape interest. The forum reported to ministers with a series of recommendations to place the ELC more centrally within the governments work. Currently SNH is establishing a group of key *public sector*

³ This is not available online

bodies to oversee action on ELC (including Historic Scotland, Forestry Commission Scotland, Architecture + Design Scotland, Visit Scotland etc) (SNH 2010).

SNH prepared a ‘gap’ analysis of Scotland’s performance against the articles of the ELC in 2009, which looked at areas where the requirements set forth by the ELC were not being met, and identified how these can improve, as well at the opportunities provided by not meeting a particular requirement (SNH, 2009). For example relating to ELC article 5:

- a: recognising landscapes in law
 - **Gap** “the holistic approach to landscape encapsulated by the ELC is not explicitly recognised in law.”
 - **Opportunity** “To consider how to promote landscape better through existing legislative frameworks for environment management (including designations, catchment management EIA/SEA regulations) and well-being duty on local authorities.”
- d: Policy integration
 - **Gap** “not having landscape explicitly included in some key SPP’s (Scottish Parliament Policies) at present e.g. Transport + minerals even though they have a large impact on landscape.”
 - **Opportunity** “To integrate landscape considerations into all relevant policy through an overarching statement in the forthcoming SPP”. (SNH, 2009)

Wales

Implementation of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in Wales is overseen by the **Countryside Council of Wales (CCW)**. CCW does not have an ELC action or implementation plan as such. CCW considers Wales to be already compliant with the articles of the ELC. However, the CCW recognises that the ELC provides a clear set of principles useful in reinforcing rather than realigning their work. CCW has evaluated *where Wales falls short* of the ELC e.g. recognising landscape in law and integrating landscape into non-landscape policies.

The landscape of the whole of Wales has been assessed according to LANDMAP, a system coordinated by the Countryside Commission for Wales (CCW) and undertaken in cooperation with the Welsh local authorities, completed in 2009. It is a standardised system which is incorporated into all planning process.⁴ Through LANDMAP, CCW has developed *Landscape Character Assessments at both national and local level* (LANDMAP). CCW is currently developing a method *for mapping a number of landscape services* (including landscape aesthetics) as a starting point for developing a green infrastructure framework.

⁴ This is an online database, assessable at <http://test.landmap.ccw.gov.uk>

The results of the mapping are to be used to ascertain demand for particular services across the country. (CCW 2010b)

CCW is using the principles of the ELC to help achieve a *sustainable environment* in Wales. The Welsh Assembly government is currently producing *regional green infrastructure studies*, giving CCW an opportunity to feed landscape in at the highest level of planning, informing decision making on both the regional and local authority scale.

Northern Ireland is discussed in a separate section.

Republic of Ireland review of ELC implementation

The Republic of Ireland signed and ratified the European Landscape Convention in March 2002 and the convention came into force in the Republic of Ireland in March 2004. The responsible implementing body for the ELC in the Republic of Ireland is the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG). Landscape Character Assessment of the whole of the Republic of Ireland is not complete; this is carried out by local authorities on an individual basis and incorporated into country development plans. There is no nationally available database (Julie Martin Associates, 2006). (see Fig 4).

DoEHLG and the Heritage Council form a ministerially appointed steering group for the ELC and the development of a *National Landscape Strategy*. The Programme for Government 2007-2012 included a commitment to design and deliver a National Landscape Strategy “in recognition of the value that the landscape provides to citizens of Ireland and that it provides a setting for people’s lives and is of important economic, social/community and environmental value” (Heritage Council, 2009). The ELC is the core framework of the draft National Landscape Strategy. The architecture and built environment policy (DoEHLG, 2009) in the Republic of Ireland has been prepared by DoEHLG and also presents a building block to the National Landscape Strategy. The Heritage Council notes that the inclusion of a definition of ‘landscape’ in the 2009 Planning and Development Bill is a significant step towards embracing the spirit of the ELC in the Republic of Ireland (Heritage Council 2010a).

In the Republic of Ireland the **Heritage Council** was established in 1964 as a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB), affiliated to the DoEHLG with executive capacity and functions. The Heritage Council “seeks to protect and enhance the richness, quality and diversity of our national heritage for everyone [and] works with its partners, particularly at local level, to increase awareness of our national heritage and to highlight its importance to public policy and everyday life” (Heritage Council, 2010c).

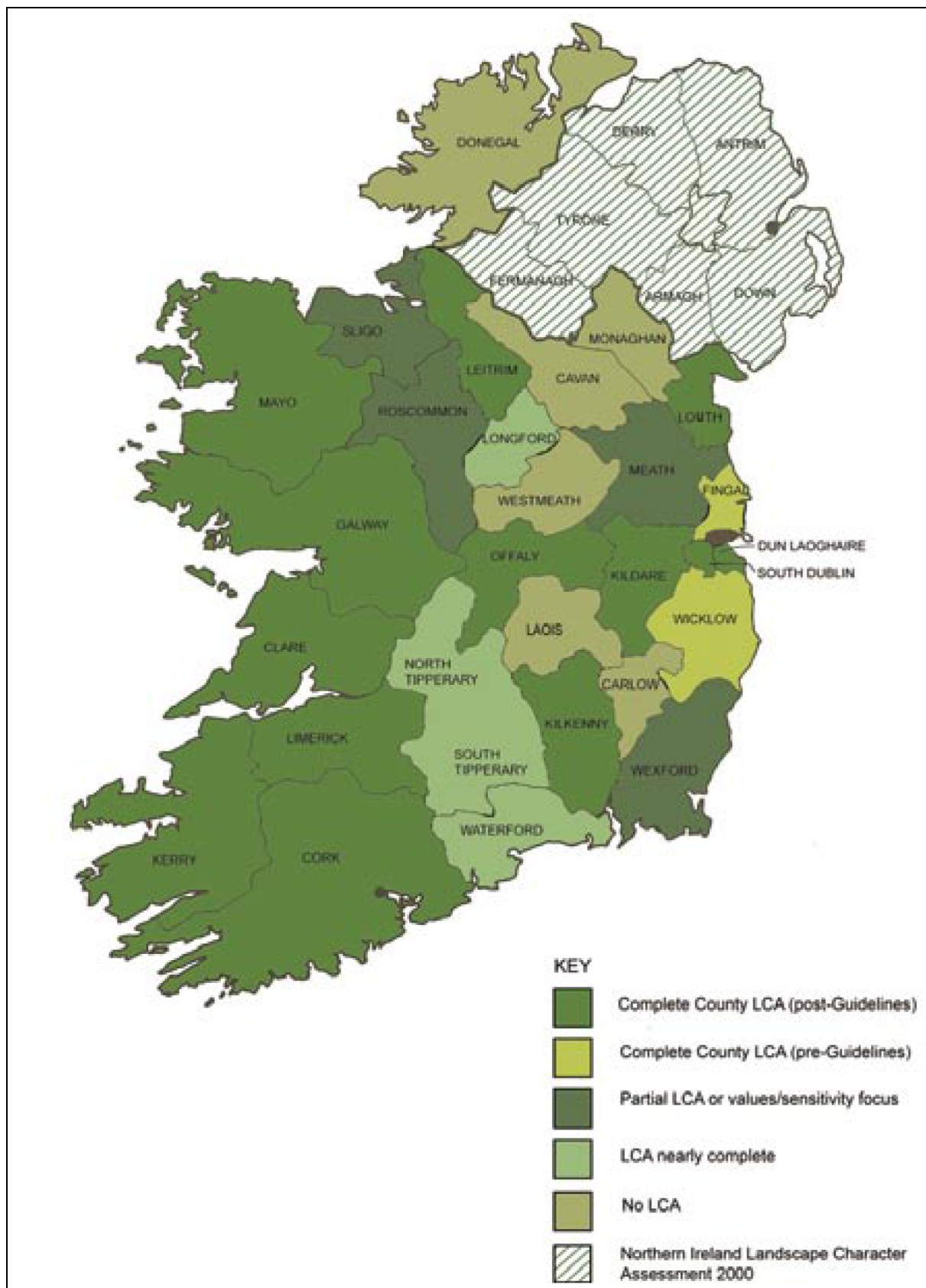


Fig 4. Map showing county authority areas where Landscape Character Assessment has been completed in the Republic of Ireland. LCA is carried out by local county authorities within their boundaries. (Julie Martin Associates 2006)

The Heritage Council operates as the (unofficial) champion for ELC in Republic of Ireland. The achievement of a National Landscape Strategy is reliant on a nationally complete Landscape Character Assessment, for which purpose the Heritage Council is now coordinating Landscape Character Assessment training program funded by the minister for DoEHLG. The Draft National Landscape Strategy recognises the trans-boundary aspect of Ireland's landscape as a core concern (particularly in light of the lack of identifiable 'champion' for ELC in Northern Ireland), so it is significant that the Heritage Council training is offered in partnership with professional institutions on both sides of the border⁵ (Heritage Council 2010b). It is notable that the Heritage Council is employing the use of GIS for the undertaking of Landscape Character Assessment whereas the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment carried out in 2000 by Planning Service and Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) was a paper based assessment (Heritage Council, 2010d).

European overview of ELC implementation

RECEP-ENELC has commented that many local authorities have substantially "strengthened their institutional commitment with regard to landscape, and adapted their technical / administrative / legal / statutory framework" (RECEP-ENELC, 2009a). RECEP-ENELC co-ordinates exemplar case studies regarding implementation of the ELC throughout Europe, and gives the example of Catalonia amongst other local authorities.

In Catalonia, an Act was passed in 2005 to give *positive content* to the Catalan parliament's adherence to the ELC, giving *legal protection* to Catalan landscapes, establishing the corresponding instruments to confront landscape challenges and guarantee the quality of the landscape. It seeks to make *economic and town planning development compatible with quality* in the environment, taking into account the heritage, cultural and economic values. It gives the government instruments for legal recognition of the values of the landscape, and to *promote actions for its preservation and improvement*.

The Landscape Observatory of Catalonia is an *advisory body (NDPB) to the government of Catalonia*. Amongst its functions are the proposal of actions directed to the improvement, restoration and *creation* of landscapes. The landscape is *catalogued*, presenting an inventory of the landscape values present in the area, a list of impacting processes, a definition of structural landscape units, definition of landscape quality objectives, and proposals for measures and actions to achieve these quality objectives. *Landscape directives* for administration, collaboration, education, and finance are based on the landscape

⁵ Irish Landscape Institute (ILI), Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch (LINI), Irish Planning Institute (IPI), Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) and Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) amongst others.

catalogues. These precisely incorporate into regulations the proposed landscape quality objectives in the development plans. These include *landscape charters* which are voluntary instruments for the harmonization of strategies between public and private agents of territory, directed to promoting the improvement of objectives, agreements and management strategies for the purpose of maintaining its values. They also include a *fund for the protection, management and planning* of the landscape (Observatori del Paisatge, 2009 and Nogue, 2009)

Northern Ireland review of ELC implementation

The implementing body for the European Landscape Convention in Northern Ireland is the Department of Environment (DOE). There is no clarity within DOE as to which agency within it is responsible for overseeing implementation. DOE is part of the DEFRA UK ELC forum (but has not been present at recent meetings.)

Landscape character assessment of the whole of Northern Ireland was undertaken in 2000 by DOE (Planning Service and Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) (now Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)) which categorised the landscape of the entire region into 130 character areas and included management guidelines for each landscape unit (ERM 2000).⁶ (see fig 5). Whilst Northern Ireland has comprehensive landscape character assessment coverage of the region, this does not include local landscape character assessment. The LCA may be a material consideration but is not systematically integral as core to planning processes. Also, unlike landscape character assessment undertaken in England by local authorities, the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment has never been reviewed or updated. The 130 landscape character assessments are presented separately and do not interrelate to form a coordinated regional Northern Ireland landscape strategy. NIEA recognise this assessment as being fundamental in development planning and development control and in 2010 is currently seeking funding to review the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (NIEA 2010e).

The **Department of the Environment Northern Ireland (DOE)** key purposes encompass environment, planning, local government, and road use. DOE comprises three agencies including Planning Service and Northern Ireland Environmental Agency (NIEA), and four divisions including the Planning and Natural Resources Division (PNRD).

⁶ This is an online database, accessible at www.ni-environment.gov.uk/land_home/landscape_home/country_landscape.htm

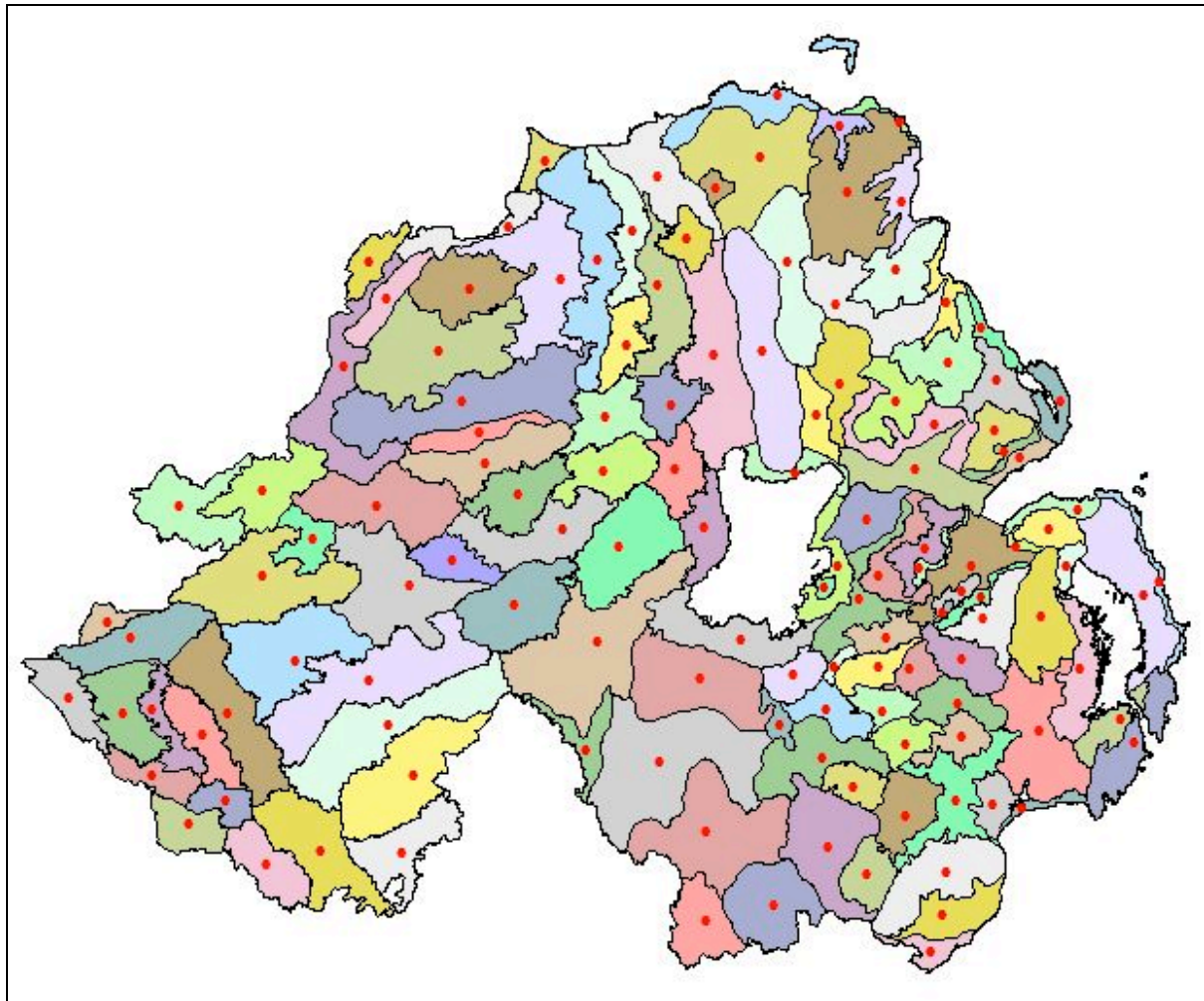


Fig 5. Map showing the 130 Landscape Character Areas in Northern Ireland assessed by ERM for NIEA and Planning Service in 2000, each area is weblinked to its landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity profile. (http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/landscape/country_landscape.htm)

The **Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)** takes the lead in advising on and implementing the government's environmental policy and strategy in Northern Ireland. NIEA's core aim is to "protect and conserve Northern Ireland's natural heritage and built environment, control pollution, and promote wider appreciation of the environment and best environmental practices" (NIEA 2010c), with a vision for "a healthy and well protected environment and heritage in Northern Ireland which contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of the whole community" (NIEA 2010b). In NIEA there are three main directorates: Environmental Protection, Built Heritage and Natural Heritage.

- The Built Heritage Directorate purposes are for the protection of historic buildings and monuments and recording built heritage (NIEA 2010g).
- The Natural Heritage Directorate encompasses management, survey and designation of sites, habitats, reserves and parks for biodiversity, science and conservation, public

activity and access, and integrated landscape character (e.g. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, special areas of countryside and coast) (NIEA 2010h).

- The Environmental Protection Directorate produced the first State of the Environment report for Northern Ireland in 2008, providing baseline indicators designed to assist future comparison and measurement of our changing environment. These include various aspects of the environment, including air and climate, water, waste and resources, biodiversity, built heritage, and land and landscape management (encompassing soil and land cover, landscape character and sustainable land management). Relating to landscape character, the report states: “Changes to landscape character are not routinely monitored. The assessment of landscape character can provide the means by which *trends* in landscape character are identified and the capacity to accommodate future landscape change can be ascertained. The contribution of archaeological and historical elements of landscape is yet to be fully recognised in assessment of landscape character and associated designations in Northern Ireland. Climate change and adaption to this will be a significant force in changes to land cover and landscape. Our response will determine land management strategies in the future” (EHS, 2008). It is noticeable that whilst landscape is considered as a living aspect evolving with adapting society, built heritage is itemised as a record of past notable items.

An executive agency within the DOE, the NIEA remit and portfolio is broader than that of an environmental protection agency. However, the NIEA is not a policy driver and its remit is dependent on relevant policy. NIEA advises sister DOE agency Planning Service regarding proposals relating to matters of NIEA concern (e.g. designated areas, even though not in NIEA ownership), but this relationship will change on Reform of Public Administration (RPA) as planning functions move outside of DOE to local authorities.

It is reported that cultural landscape assessments are carried out by integrated teams within NIEA Built and Natural Heritage and Planning Service Landscape Architects Branch, comprising landscape architecture, ecology and archaeology specialists and skill. Such integrated teams of specialists carry out Historic Landscape Characterisation on settlements and designed landscapes and areas of archaeological interest, and inform designations of Local Landscape Policy Areas, Areas of Historical Significant Value, landscape wedges and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Integrated ecology, archaeology and landscape architecture teams also evaluate Department for Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) permits against the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment. Such integrated team work should also be central to the realignment of area plans. Planning service also consults Landscape Architects Branch for strategic advice regarding development plans.

The European directive for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) legislated in 2001 requires assessment of the impact of plans and programmes (rather than development

projects) on the environment, including “biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors”, including cumulative and synergistic, short to long term positive and negative impacts (DCLG 2010). It is noted that the landscape character assessment approach covers assessment of this broad range of issues (NIEA 2010e).

Planning Service in DOE is responsible for providing “operational planning policy, Development Plans and high quality professional planning decisions”, to promote the orderly and consistent use of land, having regard for the effective use of available resources and associated human rights (Planning service, 2010). Planning Service states that four elements make up the planning system: processing applications, preparing development plans, preparing policies and enforcing planning control. Through the planning system Planning Service’s aim is to “improve the quality of life of the people of Northern Ireland by planning and managing development in ways which are sustainable and which contribute to creating a better environment” (Planning Service, 2010).

Planning operations are undertaken through six regional divisions, supported by the strategic planning division at Planning Service HQ regarding plans and policies, and containing the Design Unit, **Landscape Architects Branch** and the Strategic Projects Team for the specific design and planning consideration of major planning applications with significant regional impact. Planning Service practice consults Landscape Architects Branch with relation to tree protection orders (in addition to biodiversity specialists), and the context of buildings (in addition to conservation architects and archaeologists).

The **Planning and Natural Resource Division (PNRD)** in DOE is responsible for formulating and developing environmental policy and legislation in Northern Ireland (including water quality, waste management, air quality, biodiversity, nature conservation, the protection of the built heritage and climate change) and works in liaison with NIEA, DEFRA and the Scottish and Welsh executives. PNRD states commitment to “ensuring timely and effective transposition of the ELC, obligations and to engaging and influencing policy at UK and EU level which meets Northern Ireland’s need” (PNRD, 2010). PNRD prepared Northern Ireland’s Sustainable Development strategy in May 2006 in partnership with all Northern Ireland departments.

There are three statutory advisory councils to DOE:

The **Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC)** was established in 1989, under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985 (NCALO). Its role is to act as a statutory advisor to the DOENI on matters affecting nature conservation and the countryside, particularly designations for scientific and landscape purposes (eg. Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)). In addition CNCC comments widely on consultations from other government departments (including Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), Department of Regional Development (DRD), and Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL)) and NDPBs (non-departmental public bodies) and has representation on a wide range of advisory and delivery bodies. Most of CNCC's advice is provided to NIEA, with input to PNRD and Planning Service largely in the form of responses to consultations. It is notable that Planning Service has previously had an observer present at CNCC meetings, but there has been no attendance for some years now. Despite having no executive capacity, CNCC is in a position of close interaction with the environmental and landscape heritage NDPBs in Great Britain (Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales and Scottish Natural Heritage), representing Northern Ireland on the UK-wide Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) (on which Northern Ireland's executive body in relation to nature conservation, NIEA, is not-permitted to sit as it is a government body).

CNCC is committed to promoting and seeking implementation of the ELC within government policies and practice in order to achieve valued environments and landscapes (for example seeking update of *Shared Horizons* (Northern Ireland's protected landscapes policy document) and the upgrading of AONB purposes (in line with practice in England and Wales). The CNCC states particular concern regarding Northern Ireland's commitments under the ELC, undermined by lack of progress in updating Area Plans, and the failure of recent planning policy to recognise different landscapes across Northern Ireland (eg. PPS21, Sustainable Development in the Countryside), and stemming from Planning Service's creation of parallel designations for landscapes (rather than adoption of the landscape planning measures of the NCALO 1985 and the Amenity lands Act (NI) 1965). CNCC also states that protecting wildlife through designation of sites has had limited success in conserving wider biodiversity, and believes that landscape-scale nature conservation is necessary. The CNCC attests that ELC processes would underpin this approach, through integration of landscape purposes into planning policies, and defining objectives for a range of different landscapes through an inclusive planning process.

CNCC has been working with NIEA, CCW, and the Heritage Council for the development of a more holistic and proactive approach to land-use planning in Northern Ireland which incorporates ELC processes, based on the Ecosystem Approach (including Green Infrastructure and Integrated Management, and recognising the value to society of the services provided by our ecosystems and landscapes), and seeking to develop a sense of

local ownership and value for landscapes, in parallel with the existing ‘top-down’ process of designation and characterisation. Given that many of the processes embodied in the ELC requirements are already in existence in NI, excepting the recognition of local landscape character areas, CNCC sees the core application of the ELC as a process to inform our strategic approach to land-use planning. (CNCC 2010b).

The **Historic Monuments Council (HMC)** was established in 1971 to advise the DOE on matters relating to the protection, conservation and investigation of monuments, archaeological sites and landscapes and their settings and archaeological objects. HMC also offers advice to other government departments such as DARD, DRD and DCAL. In practice much of the HMC's advice is channelled through the NIEA and Planning Service (HMC 2010b).

The 2009 HMC term report states that whilst it has no executive powers “an important aspect of its role of advice to DOE was that of being ‘ambassadors’ for the protection, preservation and conservation of the historic monuments, landscapes and aspects of Northern Ireland” (HMC, 2009). In this aspect, HMC has stated support for the ELC approach for the assessment of landscape (or place) through a combined (not separated) consideration of natural and cultural aspects together. Likewise the ELC framework for management of the landscape (or place) in a process of change and for the future is appreciated. HMC states concern that government departments (north and south of Ireland’s border) do not sufficiently take the impact of their actions, and recognises that the framework of the ELC requires such impact to be taken into account for the benefit of the design and management of places. HMC maintains that the historic aspect of landscape is often insufficiently addressed in the landscape character assessment process (Heritage Council and English Heritage provide guidance on historic landscape assessment) (HMC, 2010a).

The **Historic Building Council (HBC)** was established in 1974 to advise DOE on matters relating to listed buildings, Conservation Areas and the industrial and defence heritage (and offer advice to other government departments such as DARD, DRD and DCAL). In practice much of the HBC’s advice is channelled through the NIEA and Planning Service (HBC, 2010).

In addition to the DOE statutory advisory councils, **Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)** was established in 1990 to complete a network of four UK regional environment links (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). NIEL is core funded by NIEA. NIEL is a “forum and networking body for organisations interested in the environment of Northern

Ireland”, which seeks to initiate and enhance the capacity of its members (individuals, groups, voluntary organisations) “to act in a coordinated way in the interests of the natural and built environment” (NIEL, 2010a). NIEL undertakes its actions through networking to inform and coordinate the environmental sector, providing strategic leadership in debate with its members and those it seeks the influence (e.g. to propose or influence regional, national and international policy that can impact on the natural and built environment), and acting as a conduit providing information between its members and government.

Supporting the ELC as a method of place and environment (including the built environment) management, NIEL is concerned that, unlike the biodiversity duty and sustainability duty (which require all public bodies to have regard to biodiversity conservation when carrying out their functions, and to act in a way that contributes to the achievement of sustainable development legislated in the Northern Ireland (miscellaneous provisions) Act 2006), the ELC is not a directive, and so carries no penalties for non-compliance. NIEL considers that these three obligations should be taken forward together as a process of environmental (natural and built) design and management by government in Northern Ireland, with integrated, coordinated delivery. NIEL highlights the need for continual update of the landscape character assessment framework and states concern that the management guidelines remain outside planning requirements). NIEL also considers that the much delayed draft Planning Policy Statement for Planning and Nature Conservation (PPS2), could be progressed by alignment with ELC principles. NIEL has previously coordinated specific fora for archaeology and the environment, and recognises the opportunity to similarly coordinate an ELC forum (with support and participation from the Landscape Character Network in England) (NIEL, 2010b).

The **Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment (MAG)** was established in 2007 to advise the Minister and Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) on matters of architecture and the built environment. Northern Ireland’s architecture and built environment policy states “a duty to this and future generations to protect a valuable and irreplaceable heritage *which enriches the character of the places in which we live and helps sustain them*. When developing new buildings and places we must understand that what we build today can have a profound and long lasting effect” (DCAL, 2008). Objective 2 states a commitment to: “facilitating the achievement of good design by promoting planning policies which are focused on architectural quality, good urban and rural design, appropriateness to locality and sustainability” (DCAL, 2008). The MAG midterm report states the overarching thrust of the policy as being “to champion the provision and maintenance of the highest standards of design quality in architecture and the built environment in Northern Ireland” (MAG, 2009a). For that purpose, the MAG has inter-advisory links with a UK- wide network of design commissions (Commission for Architecture

and the Built Environment (CABE), Architecture and Design Scotland (A + DS), and the Design Commission for Wales (DCfW)).

The MAG supports the CABE publication “Planning for Places: delivering good design through core strategies” (CABE, 2009a), which aims to guide the good design of places through the planning operations of local authorities. The core thrust of the guidance is that all ‘places’ have distinguishing features, characteristics and qualities which can identify them and make them locally distinctive and recognisable to residents and visitors (including history, location, function, evolution, form, people, lifestyle etc) . “An understanding of how a place works, what makes it special, and the opportunities it offers is critical to developing a core strategy” for the achievement of good places (CABE, 2009a). CABE proposes that a spatial strategy for an area should be structured according to place making visions drawn up for each locally distinct place within it (Fig 6). Once the place-vision is decided (a spatial design of local priorities or ‘preferred options’) a standard for living design quality in characters, use and place-community is established. The steps required for its delivery and achievement must then be identified, which requires recognition, ownership and support from all those with a living and working relationship in that place. This is the ‘place-community’, and in a living place heritage these identified steps comprise principles and framework guidelines for place management.

The CABE document aligns with MAG advice regarding planning reform in Northern Ireland, in which the MAG provides a vision for the planning system as “operating in the public interest to create quality places” (MAG, 2009b). The MAG defines the place of the built environment as a living, evolving habitat area not restricted to a physical fabric to be protected (e.g. the planning practice of Conservation Areas). The MAG recognises the difference in approach between planning practice for the built environment (which only defines and proposes management frameworks for ‘quality’ areas), and the landscape planning approach (which defines and proposes management frameworks for all areas, integral with community support for their establishment and implementation). The MAG also states that a good planning system is a management process which is continuously responsive (MAG 2009b). This relates to the Landscape Character Assessment process, where the assessment of landscape character is proposed as a continuously updated knowledge base, enabling management guidelines to be established such that the landscape character therein might reach its potential.



Fig 6. The 24 places which shape Tower Hamlets (CABE 2009a)

The MAG highlights that place (or landscape) evolves from settlement patterns, and population distribution and place development relate to landscape type and location, and thus the MAG proposes the concept of *place-community / community-place* (MAG, 2009b). A community derives its identity and lifestyle from its interaction with its place. If that interaction is beneficial to both, both will prosper. If their interaction causes detriment to one in order to favour the other, that interaction will not be sustainable, and both will ultimately suffer. To plan for place or community in separation is short-sighted and non-sustainable of either. The MAG identifies that the electoral ward constitutes a place and a

community living within it which cares about that place, and that this is generally a specific local landscape unit with a recognisable identity. Referring to the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment already in existence (albeit never updated), the MAG proposes this place framework approach be harnessed for planning reform in Northern Ireland, with the preparation and continual review of place (or landscape) quality design frameworks and management guidelines specific to each place (or local landscape character area) integral with the place-community. The MAG states that for the creation and the sustaining of value places, management guidelines for these local places must have the holistic support of the community within them and should be prepared and debated with and amongst the community, the source of information (MAG 2009b). Such local Landscape Character Assessments have been carried out by local authorities in England by and with the community of that place, and are published as Landscape (or Village) Design Statements. Guidelines for the management of these local Landscape Character Areas integrate purposes for community development and landscape quality. Specifically relating to the achievement of this process in Northern Ireland, the MAG states that each new local planning authority post RPA should have design expertise (as currently only major impact development project applications are considered by the Planning Service Design Unit (MAG, 2009b).

The **Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch (LINI)** represents the professional membership within Northern Ireland and is particularly concerned with design, management and planning for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland (LINI 2009b). With reference to planning reform in Northern Ireland, LINI states that a planning system should be a resource management system aiming to design and sustain quality place (or landscape) – “protecting, enhancing, repairing and creating the interaction between people and land for a sustainable future” (LINI 2009b), and is thus significantly more than operating to “promote the order and consistent use of land” (Planning Service 2010).

With regard to the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment, LINI states “the 130 Northern Ireland landscape character areas are broadly defined, and it is readily evident that there are several layers of more local landscape character areas identifiable within each landscape character area. Also, the landscape of each landscape character area has evolved since 2000 and is still changing due to development (and impact from development in neighbouring landscape character areas)” (LINI, 2009b). Regarding the local Landscape character areas, like the MAG, LINI states that population distribution and the development of place relate to local landscape character areas are identifiable approximately according to electoral ward size. Guidelines for the successful management of the local landscape character areas would integrate purposes for community development and landscape

quality, and have the integral support of the community within it (LINI, 2009). Specifically relating to the achievement of this process in Northern Ireland, LINI advises that there should be specific landscape architecture expertise in each new local planning authority post-RPA, as currently only major impact development project applications are considered by Planning Service Landscape Architects Branch (LINI 2009b).

Conclusion

This paper has arisen from concerns highlighted by the MAG and LINI (MAG 2009b, LINI 2009b) that planning procedures in Northern Ireland do not sufficiently serve the creation of valued environments. The paper attempts to set a baseline for government consideration of planning processes in advance of the 2011 Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland Government consultation for Planning Reform took place in autumn 2009, and the reformed planning operations will commence in May 2011.

The MAG is currently coordinating a symposium to take place in spring 2010⁷ relating to the transfer of planning powers to two local authorities (Belfast and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon), and by these two case studies seeks to highlight procedures whereby good design might be achieved in the implementation of the reformed planning system. Following the symposium a series of workshops to be held with ‘place-making representatives’ of the eleven new local authority areas (those persons who will be responsible for the implementation of the reformed planning system after the Review of Public Administration in May 2011), in coordination with the MAG and LINI.

These workshops are proposed to investigate the opportunities within the core strategies of local government to achieve the good design of valued places in Northern Ireland. It is proposed that the workshops will run from August to December 2010. The research and workshops will be carried out in three strands:

- Through the combined means and objectives of the *place-community / community-place*. Initial exploration into the concept of place-community should provide a set of indicators relating to value in the built environment. These indicators will be explored through the workshops in terms of their achievability through existing or proposed mechanisms in each new local authority area;
- The application and integration of the purposes and requirements of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) into core strategies (and the clarification of government responsibility with regard to ELC implementation in Northern Ireland);

⁷ Due to the impact of airborne volcanic ash and its restrictions on travel, this symposium has been postponed until Autumn 2010

- The exploration and identification of gaps and opportunities in core processes and the adoption of principles (potentially adhering to the ELC framework) for the achievement of valued environments (and community-places) through good design.

It is intended that analysis, conclusion and dissemination of the information gathered from this research and workshops will be prepared and made available before reformed planning procedures commence operation in May 2011.

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